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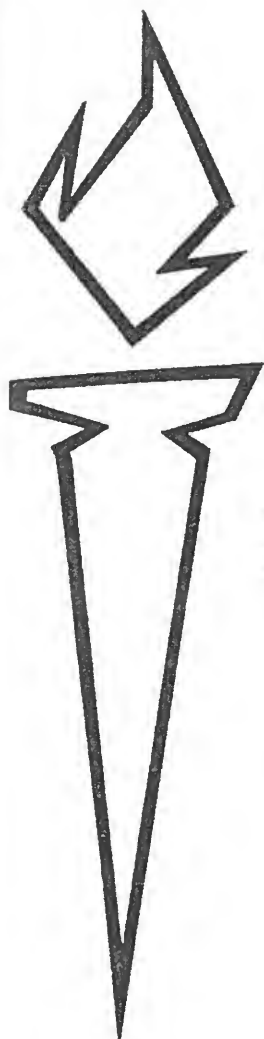


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# BOARDMANSHIP MANUAL



# BOARDMANSHIP MANUAL

A GUIDE TO SCHOOL BOARD  
SERVICE IN ALABAMA

ALABAMA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS



## Chapter VII

### The Board's Relationship with External Organizations and Agencies

by  
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As a crucial function of society, education exists not in a vacuum but in a web of complex interrelationships with numerous other institutions. The complexity which characterizes the relationship between the education community and the society at large is due, in large measure, to the proliferation of organizations and agencies which are external to education and each of which exerts its own influence. This complexity presents, at once, education's greatest challenge and its most sterling opportunity.

School boards are the legally constituted representatives of the people and are charged with the responsibility of carrying out the people's wishes concerning education. In a deeper sense, school boards embody the needs, aspirations and vision of the constituency they serve: the public. And nearly every development in education in recent years has been accompanied by an increased public awareness of and interest in the manner in which this mandate is being executed.

In its daily operations, the school board deals, in fact, with any number of constituent groups - many of which are represented by one or more agencies whose function it is to champion the interests of their members. The school board's dealings with these agencies are often adversary in nature and frequently involve a conflict of ideas with respect to the allocation of resources.

In order to avoid becoming simply a reacting entity - being constantly pulled this way and that by the various forces in competition for its influence - the school board must discreetly take the initiative in its relations with external organizations and agencies. This implies neither aggression nor truculence, but the affirmative recognition of the necessity for having problem-solving machinery in place and waiting to be applied to the resolution of conflicting ideas. Our American system in general, and our system of lay educational governance in particular, mandate a workable approach to this problem-solving function. This requires increased openness and public dialogue. The decisions which evolve from such a process usually are longer in development but are, *a priori*, more accurate reflections of the public will. In contemplating a move to more open dialogues and increased interaction with the public and external organizations and agencies, the board's attention should focus upon the development of proper communication and interaction strategies.

Attention is focused elsewhere in this manual on the role of the board member as an individual and as a member of a sitting board. Careful attention to such distinctions are crucial in this area of board relationships. Despite the fact that the

board has legal authority only as a total entity, individual members may provide yeomen service to the board by remaining active and viable in the community. They should also pursue every opportunity to increase their knowledge of educationally related issues by participating in conferences and professional meetings to the maximum extent possible. The superintendent should assume responsibility for being certain that such growth opportunities are made known to his board members. Additionally, the particular responsibilities of the board chairperson and the superintendent, as they relate to communication, should be considered in developing board operational policies. Before moving into a discussion of the several external organizations and agencies with which the board of education must deal, a numbered listing of illustrative types of involvements and interactions which boards or individual members might utilize in initiating or responding to the interests of their constituents is presented. This list is presented in the hope that it might prove helpful as board members reflect upon the multiple involvements which might develop in their service to public education and in their important role as members of a local board of education.

1. Participating as a member of a sitting board as a representative of an organization; presenting proposals for consideration by the board.
2. Participating as a member of a delegation from the board of education in the presentation to funding agencies (local governmental bodies particularly) of budget/program needs.
3. Representing the board of education at community activities.
4. Attending professional meetings of the several associations represented in the system.
5. Responding to demands or requests made of you as an individual board member so as not to violate the legal responsibilities of your position.
6. Bringing concerns received as an individual board member to the board for its full consideration.
7. Contacting political figures on an individual or group basis in hopes of gaining support for board needs and positions.
8. Discussing issues of a political nature with members of the local legislative delegation.

The following sections will survey some of the external organizations and agencies with which the school board must deal, and will touch briefly upon each's brand of influence.

### Local Government

The era of increasing needs for maintaining and extending local financial support for public education is being matched by the developing demands on local governments from other service areas. This combination makes "diversion at the local level" a potential reality. Past practices have tended to result in limited communications between the board of education and local government officials during the annual budget developing process. Boards should exert some initiative in this area to constantly keep local decision-makers involved and informed relative to the financial needs of the public schools. Such continuing discussions should also open up ways for other governmental agencies such as public health, public works, parks and recreation, etc. to assume their responsibilities and to

remove the schools from their isolated role of attempting to solve all of society's problems.

### Other Local Boards of Education

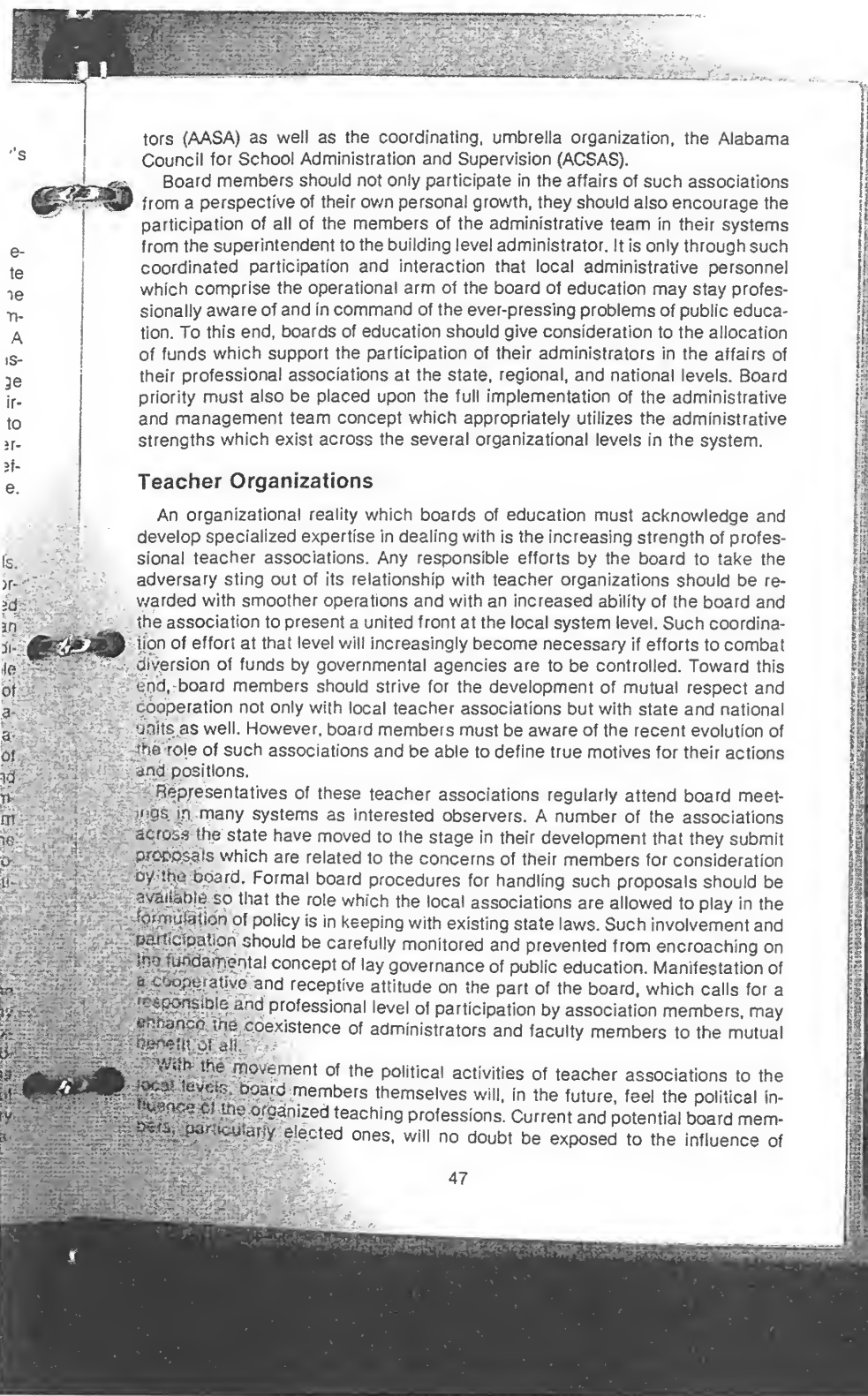
Members of local boards of education may gain a degree of comfort from a realization that their public service plight is shared by 127 bodies across the State of Alabama. All boards of education, while not necessarily dealing with the same problems in the several systems, are engaged in a common undertaking - the improvement of public education - and must come to grips with similar problems. A source of continuing support and interaction, possibly of the most immediate assistance, should come from neighboring boards through the cooperative linkage of their systems through the regular contact of superintendents and board chairpersons. Some systems report beneficial results from member visitations to other board sessions and even to joint meetings when items with common perspectives are being considered. The move in federal programs to consortium efforts across system lines will probably result in more such meetings in the future.

### School Boards Associations

Associations of school boards exist on the national, regional, and state levels. Conferences and meetings sponsored by these associations provide rich opportunities for the exchange of ideas among board members. The insights gained and the cooperation developed through involvement with such associations can materially enhance the capacity of board members to perform their duties. Additionally, these organizations frequently generate and disseminate valuable printed materials to their members. This manual and the compendium of *Alabama School Laws* are two examples of such efforts by the Alabama Association of School Boards. At the national level, the National School Boards Association serves the needs of local boards in the 50 states through the provision of consultant services, the production of operationally based publications and materials, and the offering of conferences on current topics of interest. An example of leadership at the national level is the board policy codification system which has been so influential in the development of viable board policies at the local level. Boards who do not participate actively in growth opportunities provided by these associations or who do not see them as valuable sources of continuing consultative assistance are being rather short-sighted.

### Administrator Organizations

Boards of education in the South possibly have more of a vested interest in the development of viable professional associations of administrators than in any other area of their external relationships. The massive imbalance which has existed in the past between the organized teacher voice and the organized administrator hopefully will be corrected by the continued development in Alabama of the several member organizations such as the Alabama Department of Elementary School Principals (ADESP), the Alabama Association of Secondary School Principals (AASSP), and the Alabama Association of School Administrators.



tors (AASA) as well as the coordinating, umbrella organization, the Alabama Council for School Administration and Supervision (ACSAS).

Board members should not only participate in the affairs of such associations from a perspective of their own personal growth, they should also encourage the participation of all of the members of the administrative team in their systems from the superintendent to the building level administrator. It is only through such coordinated participation and interaction that local administrative personnel which comprise the operational arm of the board of education may stay professionally aware of and in command of the ever-pressing problems of public education. To this end, boards of education should give consideration to the allocation of funds which support the participation of their administrators in the affairs of their professional associations at the state, regional, and national levels. Board priority must also be placed upon the full implementation of the administrative and management team concept which appropriately utilizes the administrative strengths which exist across the several organizational levels in the system.

### Teacher Organizations

An organizational reality which boards of education must acknowledge and develop specialized expertise in dealing with is the increasing strength of professional teacher associations. Any responsible efforts by the board to take the adversary sting out of its relationship with teacher organizations should be rewarded with smoother operations and with an increased ability of the board and the association to present a united front at the local system level. Such coordination of effort at that level will increasingly become necessary if efforts to combat diversion of funds by governmental agencies are to be controlled. Toward this end, board members should strive for the development of mutual respect and cooperation not only with local teacher associations but with state and national units as well. However, board members must be aware of the recent evolution of the role of such associations and be able to define true motives for their actions and positions.

Representatives of these teacher associations regularly attend board meetings in many systems as interested observers. A number of the associations across the state have moved to the stage in their development that they submit proposals which are related to the concerns of their members for consideration by the board. Formal board procedures for handling such proposals should be available so that the role which the local associations are allowed to play in the formulation of policy is in keeping with existing state laws. Such involvement and participation should be carefully monitored and prevented from encroaching on the fundamental concept of lay governance of public education. Manifestation of a cooperative and receptive attitude on the part of the board, which calls for a responsible and professional level of participation by association members, may enhance the coexistence of administrators and faculty members to the mutual benefit of all.

With the movement of the political activities of teacher associations to the local levels, board members themselves will, in the future, feel the political influence of the organized teaching professions. Current and potential board members, particularly elected ones, will no doubt be exposed to the influence of

teacher power during the campaign process as well as during their tenure on boards. It goes without saying that board members are selected to serve the broader public interests in the educative process and not the narrow interest of any pressure group.

### Support Employee Organizations

Similar sensitivity is required of the school board in its interface with organizations of support employees. Again, actions which foster an attitude of teamwork contribute to the success of the vital support functions and minimize the likelihood of interruptions to the educative process. Such issues as the extension of tenure to support employees and the proliferation of collective bargaining among support staff should be studied and understood by board members.

### The State Department of Education

Increasingly, the State Department of Education (SDE), as its role is defined by policy developed by the State Board of Education and implemented through the administrative office of the State Superintendent of Education, is becoming a viable force in efforts to improve public education in Alabama. Local boards should be aware of these developments and should make certain that their systems draw heavily on this source of assistance in the on-going operations of the school. Traditionally, the State Department of Education has served in basically a regulatory role with emphasis upon compliance with legal mandates. While this source of assistance remains crucial, the efforts on the part of the State Superintendent to move the department toward a leadership and development role should be encouraged by local boards of education. The developing role of the State Superintendent as a responsible, coordinated voice for public education in Alabama should be acknowledged at the local level. No stone should be left unturned in efforts to insure that the State Superintendent is knowledgeable relative to the needs and problems which exist at the operational levels.

### The Legislature

Local boards of education as collective bodies and members as individuals must increasingly come to the realization that educational decisions, particularly as they are related to allocation of the ever-scarce financial resources, are political decisions. While the local school boards relate only peripherally to the state legislative bodies, important benefits can result from the development of close working relationships between the boards and their local legislators. In the truest sense, school board members and legislators are engaged in the cooperative venture of protecting and representing the public's will.

Rightfully so, the collective voices of professional associations and the individual voices of educators should be heard by the legislature. Local boards should not only make certain their counsel is utilized by their legislative representatives, they should also support the development of strong legislative influence roles for AASB. Individual board members should respond to requests from state level association leadership to discuss pending legislation with their local legislators. Boards should not allow the relationships with their legislators to



degenerate into "during the session, crisis-type" discussions only. Rather, regular and continuing dialogue should be maintained through the superintendent, board chairperson and through periodic visits of legislators as individuals and groups with the total board.

### **Institutions of Higher Learning**

Several of the colleges and universities in Alabama and the region have effective programs of research and services which should be viewed by boards of education as sources of valuable assistance. The trend in both pre-service and in-service education toward the multiple involvement of local school systems, professional associations, the State Department of Education, and teacher preparation institutions are likely to produce increased interaction with these institutions in the future. Boards should be especially sensitive to institutions in their immediate area and should be certain that their systems relate to them in the numerous ways which are mutually beneficial both to the local schools and to the institutions.

### **The Attorney General and the Courts**

As the nature of the law's relationship to the schools grows in complexity, so must the board's and the individual members' sensitivity to their legal responsibility grow in sophistication. While each board may turn to several sources for legal assistance, such as their board attorney, the Alabama Association of School Boards, and the State Department of Education, a key source of legal assistance for many boards is the Office of the Attorney General of Alabama. When doubts arise as to the proper course of actions based upon interpretations gained through the several additional sources cited above, boards should, without question, request through their superintendent an attorney general's opinion in the pending matter. Such opinions have the influence of law until they are tested in subsequent court proceedings. With the increasing tendency in our society to settle everything through the courts, it behooves the superintendent and the local board to be as completely knowledgeable about the requirements of the law as possible so as to guard against unnecessary risks. Additionally, the expense of needless legal actions which result when proper attention is not given to the requirements of due process and related procedures is a cost most boards can ill afford.

### **Federal Agencies**

Expertise and advocacy should characterize the school board's dealings with the U.S. Office of Education and with any other federal agency empowered to effect the educational process. Knowledge of the procedures and potentialities of the appropriate federal agencies is important to all educational leaders.

### **Summary**

As a general principle, the school board should manage its relationships with

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all external agencies in a manner which fulfills its responsibility to represent the public. Successful school leadership is a function of the cooperation of diverse groups with different and often conflicting interests. School boards, with their diversity of membership, their lay organization, and their broad base of influence, are in an ideal position to orchestrate this cooperation to the ultimate benefit of students. To the extent that they do this successfully, school boards will greatly facilitate the progress of this crucial work.